

S P E C I A L E D I T I O N

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# U.S. Humiliation—a Diary from Cairo

by THOMAS THOMPSON

*With other Americans in Cairo, LIFE's Paris bureau chief was confined to a hotel, threatened by mobs, insulted, and expelled from Egypt. This is his diary of what happened.*

**F**OR the first hour of war on Monday morning Cairo is apprehensive, hearing the window-shaking booms of the ack-ack and seeing jet trails in the hazy summer sky. But at 10, Cairo radio broadcasts the news that Egyptian planes have already shot down 24 Israeli aircraft and the ancient city erupts with joy. From the minarets old men in galabias (long gowns) dance and shake their arms in triumph. Stooped old women in black veils make shrill chuckling noises, like the cries of jungle birds. "The battle of liberation has begun," cries the radio. But news bulletins are few and far between. Most of the programing is devoted to martial music and revolutionary hymns, played over and over. In an hour the radio claims the bag of Israeli planes has climbed to 45. Then 60. By lunch it is 70. The radio begins broadcasting to Arab refugees from Palestine throughout the Middle East: "Pack your bags! We will be in Tel Aviv by tomorrow night."

By nightfall Cairo radio informs its millions of listeners that Egypt and her allies have shot down more than 100 Israeli planes against a loss of only two. The city goes to sleep confident the war will be quick and the triumph sweet, that almost all that remains is for Nasser to fly in triumph to Tel Aviv. But the night is filled with yellow and orange bursts of ack-ack and streams of tracer bullets.

**TUESDAY**  
Cairo awakens to alarming news. Official radio and government-controlled papers blare out that the United States and Great Britain are conspiring with Israel in this holy war. Never mind, says the radio—we are still destroying Israel. In the past hour we have

downd 10 more Israeli planes, and Syria six. The press corps begs to be allowed to see some of the fruits of the remarkable victory but is turned down.

Meanwhile, the mood of the man on the street has quickly changed from one of national purpose and pride to one of hate for Americans. A group of Americans trying to get a taxi outside the U.S. Embassy is set upon by a crowd. Taxi drivers

play a kind of game, slowing down as if they are going to stop for an American, then swerving, trying to knock him down.

In Alexandria, a howling rabble overpowers the guard outside the American consulate and bursts in, knocking Consul General David Fritzlan out of the way and pushing him and his aides into the room-sized consulate vault. They drench the furniture and equipment with kerosene and then toss in Molotov cocktails. The offices are gutted. For more than half an hour the consul is trapped inside the vault, not knowing the fire is raging outside. Four consulate automobiles parked on the grounds are burned, and the mob then turns to the handsome, splendidly equipped USIS library. The building quickly goes up in flame. The consul and his staff are taken to the police station where they are held two hours "for your own protection." In all of this, there is not a single expression of sympathy or regret, despite the fact that the consul has lived in Alexandria for three years and enjoyed good relations with the official community.

In Cairo, the Western press is told that chances are very good that Egypt will sever relations with the United States before the end of the day. "What will happen to the correspondents then?" an American reporter asks. "You will be allowed to stay and work. It has been decided," the press officer answers. But at 7:30, he shows up at the Hilton Hotel coffee shop

where the press corps is dining by candlelight—the city is blacked out. He tells the correspondents that the diplomatic break has indeed occurred. "I have a message for you," he says. "You must leave the country immediately." Someone asks whether it is all right to finish dinner. "Yes, but then you must leave." The American Embassy is also stunned by the news. To be told to leave a country under cover of darkness is an action of unbelievable diplomatic rudeness.

**WEDNESDAY**  
On this, the third day of the war, the people in the streets of Cairo are beginning to grow wary. Hourly the radio broadcasts new claims of Egyptian triumphs and the war should be over by now. Yet the newspapers are using sentences like "Our valiant forces have withdrawn and regrouped at the second line of defense, fighting with unparalleled ferocity and heroism." The news that Jordan has quit is buried deep inside a story about what the U.N. is doing.

The American press corps is granted a reprieve of sorts. Instead of having to leave Egypt immediately, correspondents are herded into a dingy hotel called the Nile, chosen because it has only one easily guarded exit. Riot cops with shields and bamboo poles, assisted by a cavalry squadron on spirited white and gray Arabian horses, surround the hotel and the nearby American Embassy. Meals in the Nile Hotel are served in a hot, smelly boiler room immediately dubbed the "Black Hole of Calcutta." Some news is obtained from shortwave radios. When it is not jammed, the BBC indicates that Israel has all but annihilated the Egyptian forces. Incredibly, Nasser's mammoth propaganda machine, broadcasting from radio towers atop the hills west of Cairo, is still deceiving his people into thinking that victory is near.

The American Embassy staff is meanwhile involved in an ugly negotiation with the Egyptians over

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how many people can stay behind as a housekeeping staff. Finally the embassy has 230 people. Ambassador Nolte asks for permission to keep 59. "Unrealistic! Unacceptable!" cry the Egyptians, who then counter with an offer of 23. "Your planes are killing Egyptian boys," they say. Nolte accepts the 23 figure, but the Egyptians, pouring salt in the wound, lower the number to four. The Americans, they announce, want to leave behind 15 CIA spies. Finally a figure of six is agreed upon, and the Spanish Embassy consents to serve as go-between in the infuriating expulsion.

All over the country Americans are being rounded up and ordered to leave—oilmen in the far reaches of the blistering desert, students, missionaries, tourists wandering through the temples at Luxor, bird collectors, beatniks, residents who have spent their lives in Cairo.

**T**HURSDAY  
The dragnet continues and is thorough and ruthless. An 82-year-old American woman, Mrs. Helen Van Dyke, is routed from her Cairo home and told to pack her things and report to the Nile Hotel in 15 minutes. "I have lived all my life in Cairo," she begs them. "How can I pack up a lifetime in 15 minutes?" But there is to be no compassion and soon she is led, hobbling with her cane, into the hotel.

An American naval research scientist, who has spent a year patiently trying to develop a vaccine for spinal meningitis, a disease that killed hundreds of North Africans this very year, is surrounded by machine-gun-wielding troops as he backs his car out of his driveway. He has no time to pack up his precious meningitis specimens and strains. "I was so close," he says, this man who was trying to do something to benefit the Egyptians.

Nasser's effort to keep his people misinformed now becomes increasingly absurd. A 15-year-old Alexandria youth is said to have captured six Israeli frogmen. Every Cairo newspaper is filled with amateurish photographs of the boy and Egyptian police pointing to

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the rocks on the shore where the  
frogmen were supposed to have  
been found. There are no pictures  
of the frogmen themselves but the  
brave boy will get a savings bond  
worth about \$20 and a "well-pay-  
ing" government job.

An Israeli jet screeches low over the heart of Cairo heading for the airport, and a long air raid alert ensues. The ack-ack is loud and close now, and the skies are filled with black and white puffs of smoke. If people wonder how come the Israelis have any planes left to fly over Cairo, the propaganda machine supplies the answer: the Americans are providing a new Israeli airplane for every aircraft bravely shot down by the Egyptians. After another air raid Thursday night Egyptian security police accuse American journalists of signaling Israeli aircraft by lighting cigarettes on the terraces of their hotel rooms.

At 11 p.m. comes the startling news—startling to most Egyptians at least—that Egypt is accepting the United Nations cease-fire. Still no word from Nasser himself. He has been strangely silent all week.

**FRIDAY**

The U.S. Embassy gets word to the American colony that a boat has been chartered and will leave Alexandria on Saturday. The expelled Americans will go to the seaport city by train in the early morning.

For the Egyptians, the big news of the day is that Nasser will speak that night. The billboards and banners that cried for war are missing from the city now. Down have come the posters that showed ferocious Egyptian soldiers kicking shriveled-up Jews out of Palestine. Gone are the street-corner effigies of Jews with nooses around their necks. By 7:30, everybody in Cairo has got within earshot of a radio or television set for the big speech. At last the familiar, handsome face appears. Nasser is visibly subdued. The speech is even boring until he almost casually tosses in the news that he is quitting and turning over the reins of state to an unpopular vice president. He asks God's good will and the screen goes dark.

It takes 30 minutes for the stunning development to soak in, and then the noise begins, dull at first, like the rumble of a faraway storm, but building quickly. Soon the entire city is filled with the chant,

dark now and the air raid sirens split the roaring mobs. The city is blacked out. Antiaircraft guns blast into the skies for a quarter of an hour. Has Israel violated the cease-fire? Or is Nasser putting on a show for his people? Has everything been prearranged—even to the trucks filled with Arab Socialist Union party faithful who head for Nasser's residence and scream their loyalty, begging him to stay on? It would seem so. The resignation, the ack-ack, the blackout, the momentary panic, the hysterical mobs, all of it builds to the inescapable conclusion that only Nasser could keep the country together.

Now the Americans realize they are in genuine danger. The mobs are barely in control. Inside the Nile Hotel confinement center, guards roughly shove everyone into the lobby and keep them there in the pitch black for two hours. Upstairs police comb through the rooms looking for candles or flashlights which might be used to signal Israeli planes. A British woman becomes hysterical. "They're going to kill us all," she moans. Her husband quiets her. But it does seem strange that all these defenseless people should be gathered into one group in an absolutely black chamber. Old hands in the Middle East could recall the identical situation during the 1958 upheaval in Iraq, when Americans and other foreigners were herded into a hotel lobby in Baghdad and hacked to death by mobs. If mobs made a similar move against the Nile Hotel, there could be no stopping them.

Finally, at midnight, the Americans are allowed to go to their rooms and attempt to sleep, but sleep comes hard. Even with the shutters closed and the doors locked, the sounds of the mobs roaming the city come through. In the Nile Hilton a few blocks

away, a young Texas oilman is beaten and kicked because he went to the aid of a British friend who was being pummeled by security guards for lighting a cigaret and "signaling."

SATURDAY



**N**asser's resignation as president sparked demonstrations demanding he return to his job. He did, and then,

The move must be made now—in the middle of the night—or else safety cannot be assured. Telephone calls go out all over Cairo informing Americans to come to the railroad station immediately. Some Americans who had felt they would be allowed to stay are told permission has been denied. There is no time to pack, no time to gather personal effects, baby albums, the things that every family has and cherishes. One man leaves a priceless collection of Egyptian and Oriental art in the Nile Hotel.

The Americans are jammed brusquely into stuffy trucks, the kind used for prisoners. Comments are made about how people must have felt on their way to Auschwitz. Some people vomit. Some faint. But at the station there is a surprise. Instead of one of the tumble-down trains that rattle along the Egyptian countryside, a sleek, air-conditioned train is waiting. The Americans pile onto it with relief.

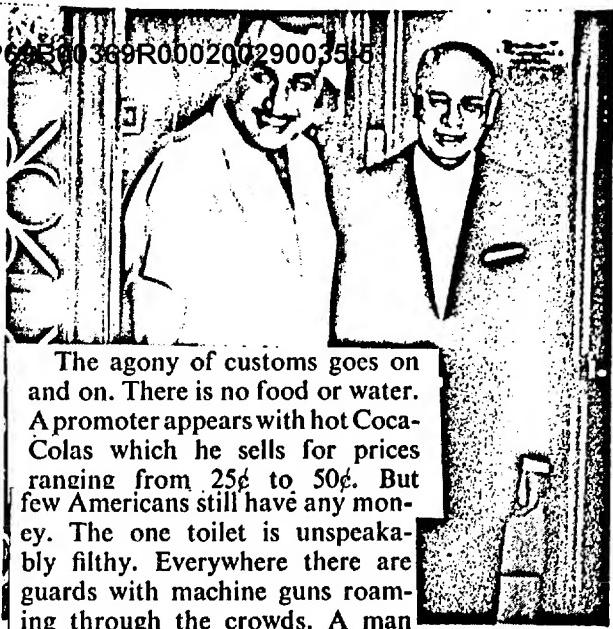
At little villages along the way, small crowds of Arabs gather in the early dawn. They take off their shoes and wave the soles at the passing train. It is their maximum insult: the object of their scorn is lower than the soles of their shoes. At Alexandria, long lines of police with rifles and machine guns form a path to the customs house. The U.S. Embassy has been informed that the Egyptian government will relax its customs requirements and

with Sadok Mokadden, president of the Tunisian Assembly, at his side, saw the celebration outside his home.

make the exit a quick one. But this will not be so.

For the next 10 hours, the 600 American expellees are subjected to shocking and cruel harassment, scorn and even thievery. There are no porters to help with the baggage and people have to lug their hastily packed suitcases into the customs hall where inspectors paw over them ruthlessly. All film is confiscated. The Egyptians seem almost pathologically frightened that photos of their war might get out. One man nearly weeps as inspectors seize 30 rolls of movie film he has taken on a world tour. "It's not political," he pleads. A CBS television man, angered that his unexposed film is being taken along with his exposed footage, begins ripping the film out of its container and ruining it before the Egyptians can grab it. Company documents are grabbed, irreplaceable papers lost. Thousands of dollars' worth of American and Egyptian money is "put into custody." One woman has to surrender \$200 and is told that the amount is being marked down on a customs declaration and that it will be returned. A few hours later she is told the form has been lost. Therefore, no restitution is possible.

Wallets and ladies' purses are meticulously gone through. A few victims are made to strip. The official explanation for the seizure of money is that it is forbidden to take Egyptian currency out of the country—or American money either, for that matter—unless the owner can produce a certain form he was given when he first entered Egypt. DelBasten20001/1160kpaee RDP69A0369R000200290035-5 some of whom had lived in Egypt for many years, have long ago lost



The agony of customs goes on and on. There is no food or water. A promoter appears with hot Coca-Colas which he sells for prices ranging from 25¢ to 50¢. But few Americans still have any money. The one toilet is unspeakably filthy. Everywhere there are guards with machine guns roaming through the crowds. A man collapses with a perforated ulcer and is put on a hard bench while an Egyptian doctor is summoned. After 45 minutes, when no doctor has come, he is taken to the Alexandria Hospital. His condition is grave.

At 4 p.m. the chartered Greek ship *Carina* arrives and Americans are permitted to board, once again passing through the files of surly troops armed with submachine guns. In a nearby berth they can see former King Farouk's yacht, now reserved for Nasser. It gleams white and gold. The Egyptians refuse to let porters help with luggage, so the American men form a long human chain, wasting another hour getting the bags aboard. Eventually, almost 600 people crowd onto a ship built for 400. The Egyptians give the *Carina* only 4,000 tons of water, although they normally would allow it 24,000 tons. The official explanation is that there is a water shortage.

At 5:30 the ship sails out of the fabled harbor of Alexandria accompanied by Russian-made Egyptian submarines and patrol boats carrying police who study the ship through binoculars. If anyone tries to take a photograph, the Egyptians have warned, the *Carina* will be stopped and the person arrested. The boats follow the *Carina* out onto the high seas until an American cruiser appears as an escort.

There are not enough beds. Many have to sleep in deck chairs, and on the floor. There are long lines to eat dinner. With 130 Texas oilmen aboard, the bar quickly runs out of beer and wine of this matters. The ordeal of the long week of the short war is over.